

Hill Country Chorale Singer's Handbook



Hill Country Vocal Arts Society
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Hill Country Chorale

Singer's Handbook

In an effort to be the best that we can, we request each singer's cooperation in following certain procedures. While we all join the Hill Country Chorale to make beautiful music and to have fun while doing so, we have established some practices to ensure that everything goes smoothly.

Dues

Dues are set each year by the Board of Directors, and are payable at the reception held before rehearsals begin in September or at the singer's first rehearsal thereafter. When dues are paid, each singer will receive a copy of all the music for the next concert. A concert folder also will be issued if a singer requests one. Please note that the dues are not a music security deposit; dues will not be refunded if you decide later to leave the Chorale. Consider it a donation, and ask your accountant if it's deductible.

Singers who cannot pay their dues at the reception will be issued a temporary folder, to be returned at the end of each rehearsal. If dues are not paid by the end of the third rehearsal, a singer will be dropped from the roster.

Music is to be returned to the Chorale librarian at the end of every concert. The folders will be returned after the last concert of the year. If you learn that you must leave the chorus for any reason, please return your music and folder to the chorus librarian.

Attendance

Please see the calendar for the concert season on the web site. Please mark your personal calendar now so as to avoid conflicts later.

Rehearsals are from 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm each Monday night in the choir room of First Presbyterian Church. Please be there early so you can visit with friends, catch up on notes and become mentally sharp for a **downbeat promptly at 6:30 pm.**

Singers should attend all rehearsals for each concert. We have a busy schedule, and often we will rehearse music for more than one concert at a time. Even if you think you know the music, it is important that singers attend all rehearsals in order to be prepared for the next concert in our series.

We realize, though, that all of us are busy and might have a conflict occasionally that cannot be avoided. Should it be necessary to miss a rehearsal, please contact your section leader before the missed rehearsal.

When you arrive at the rehearsal hall, check in with your section leader. This is how we keep attendance. If you do not check in, you are absent. Too many absences and you may be asked not to participate in a concert.

All concert week rehearsals are mandatory. This is the time for final polishing, for sounding out a venue's acoustics and often for working with an accompanying ensemble for the first time. One of the most difficult challenges for any singer is to perform when nothing that he or she hears is familiar. Before every concert, we re-tune our ears to new sounds and new surroundings.

Music

The Hill Country Chorale provides our music, as well as a black music folder. The music and folders remain the property of the Hill Country Chorale.¹ After each concert, turn in the music used for that concert; there will be collection boxes placed in obvious locations. After the season's last concert, turn in all music and your music folder. Be sure to remove personal items from your folder before you do so.

Because the Chorale owns the music and because other singers likely will use it in the future, **please do not make any marks on the music using any form of pen or highlighter.** Use pencil only. When the Chorale borrows music from another organization for you to use, please be sure to make your pencil markings lightly as the music will have to be returned in good condition.

Please do not punch holes in your music.

Please do not make notes on your music that do not pertain to the conductor's instructions.

¹ Singers who wish may use their own plain black folder.

Performing as Amateurs to Professional Standards

Our goal is to make beautiful music and to have fun, performing as amateurs to professional standards. To achieve this, we observe certain disciplines so that we can make the most of each minute of each rehearsal.

Before Rehearsal

1. Have all music needed for rehearsal with you.
2. Have a sharp pencil with an eraser for making and changing notations in your score. Make marks that you can see and understand, but keep them easily erasable for the next person who uses the music. **Do not use ink or highlighter**, as the score will be returned to the Chorale library for future use.
3. Arrive early. Late arrivals distract both the conductor and other singers. Use the time before rehearsal to meet new friends, to visit with old ones, and to help with setup arrangements. **Please be seated, alert and ready for a downbeat by 6:30.**
4. If you missed the previous rehearsal, arrange to get any score markings and notes from a member of your section.
5. **Silence your cell phone and/or pager.**

During Rehearsal

1. Treat the vocalization period as a time to prepare yourself physically and mentally for singing. Think of vocalizing as you would think of stretching before a good workout. Use the vocal exercises to develop your own vocal technique and to adjust your voice into the ensemble. Please warm up on the way to rehearsal. The ensemble vocalization is not long enough to prepare an individual voice for two hours of singing. It is generally geared more toward developing ensemble techniques. The best choral tone is achieved when each individual voice is contributing a free, healthy, focused and well-produced tone in balance and perfect blend with others in the same voice part.
2. Be sure to “**listen louder than you sing.**” Even when the score requests the loudest dynamic, your individual sound must always be well-produced and in balance. The goal is to have each section produce its own voice so that the audience hears only four sounds – soprano, alto, tenor and bass. Individual voices should never be identifiable.
3. Please do not wear perfume, cologne, hair spray or after-shave lotions; deodorant is OK. Many people have allergies that are aggravated even by the odor of these substances.

4. **Limit visiting to before and after rehearsal and during the break. Please do not talk while the conductor is rehearsing another section.** Watch what that section is working on and apply it to your understanding of your part. This can save a lot of time and repetition. Resist the urge to chat as soon as the conductor stops the ensemble to fix something. The conductor stops for a reason and you will miss it if you talk on the cut-off. (Hint: if everyone knows where the conductor is starting except you, you probably were not listening.)
5. Use correct posture! Sit up straight with both feet on the floor. Be an example to choral neighbors. Good posture means that you are ready to do your best and that you are alert. Poor posture signals to the director and to other choir members that you are tired and that this really isn't that important.
6. Hold your music high so you can maintain visual contact with the conductor while also reading your score. Be sure to “check in” for the downbeat at least every other measure.
7. Use your pencil! Experienced singers know that they cannot remember details of breathing, phrasing, dynamics, articulation etc. from week to week. Mark it. The music is in the details that are not printed on the page. Not marking tells everyone that you think you are good enough not to have to mark things. You're not; no one is. The concert master of an orchestra marks every detail the conductor mentions.
8. Do not hum or practice intervals during stops in the rehearsal. You will miss whatever corrections the conductor is making and distract those around you. Remember, the interval you hum may not be the correct one; your humming may confuse those around you. If you need to hear something, ask.
9. Internalize the pulse. Each piece of music has a steady beat – “1-2-3-4” or “1-2-3” etc. For musicians, the pulse is a subdivision of that beat – “1-and-2-and-3-and 4 and” or if the tempo is slow, “1-e-and-uh, 2-e-and-uh, 3-e-and-uh, 4-e-and-uh.” Most details of articulation happen on a subdivision of the beat. For example, “put the “t” on the ‘and’ of 2” or “breathe on the 'and' of 4.” “Internalizing the pulse” is a musician's ability to develop an inner sense of the subdivided beat. Just as one can feel the physical pulse of the heart, singers feel a rhythmic pulse that drives the piece of music.

During a Concert

Giving a concert involves much more than learning the music. Every week, we work hard in rehearsal so that we can perform the music to the best of our ability. All this is for naught, however, if our stage decorum fails to present the Chorale as a serious ensemble that takes pride in how it looks and sounds. The audience evaluates us as much on the basis of how we look as on how we sing. This means we pay attention to the way we enter the stage, the way we present ourselves during every single moment that we are on the stage, and the way we leave the stage. The goal is to show the audience that, while we are amateurs, we perform to professional standards.

Do not follow soloists. If the music calls for you to rest, stop singing and turn to the next page where you do sing. Often, this will require paper-clipping pages in the music where only the soloist is singing.

Dress code

Part of this visual presentation involves the way in which we dress. No individual should “stand out” from the ensemble. Differences distract the audience’s attention. Rather, the audience’s focus should be on the group as a whole. To foster this uniform Chorale presentation, we have adopted a dress code.

1. Ladies: Black pants or dress, ankle or floor length. Black long-sleeved (at least to the elbow) tops. Black closed-toe shoes and black hose or socks. Be restrained in choice of jewelry and above all, avoid wearing or showing anything that moves while you sing! Earrings should be smaller than a quarter.
2. Gentlemen: Tuxedo or black suit with black bow tie and white shirt. Black socks and shined black shoes. **Please button jackets before going on stage** (if you can).
3. Ladies and Gentlemen: As is the case during rehearsals, be considerate and avoid using any fragrance whatsoever. The use of deodorant is encouraged, preferably unscented. Remember, the smallest whiff of perfume can literally render your neighbors unable to sing at all and cause severe discomfort.

In addition to everything noted above for rehearsals, constantly check your musical pulse with the conductor's beat. Resist keeping time with your foot. It is a difficult habit to break, especially for former band members who have been taught to tap their foot. The trouble arises when someone taps at a tempo different than the conductor’s, thus confusing his or her neighbors. Always take the conductor's tempo and check it often.

Going on Stage

1. Line up in rehearsal room – just be alert and follow instructions. **Please don’t talk** while we’re doing this as we surely will be short on time.
2. Whoever leads the group, please wait for a signal before entering the stage. This will avoid gaps in the procession.
3. Hold folders in the hand that is away from the audience as you enter.
4. Pay attention to instructions regarding how we will enter the stage.

5. **Do not talk** while taking your place on stage. The audience is watching every move we make! Look attentive, alert and happy!

Acknowledge Audience Applause

In between songs, **do not shuffle through music** to prepare for the next song while the audience is applauding the song we just finished. This is rude. Better by far to lower your music to about waist level, stand, and smile at the audience. When the conductor returns to the podium, prepare your music for the next selection. Your music should be arranged in concert order, so this preparation should take seconds to accomplish.

At the End

Two exceptions to the above are just before an intermission or just before the end of the concert. In these instances, close your books and lower them to your side in your left hand. As before, stand and smile at the audience to acknowledge applause. When you leave the stage, hold your music in the hand that is away from the audience.

In summary, let's convince the audience by our music and by our demeanor that we truly are amateurs performing to professional standards, that we love singing and enjoy performing with the Chorale, and that we are happy that each person came to this concert!

These are very small things, but observing them will enhance greatly the choir's presentation. They are small actions that enhance singing as amateurs to professional standards.

Smile!

Break a leg!

